

WITSToB

(what is that supposed to be)
A periodical periodical about the
table-top role-playing game hobby
Issue 1



WITSToB

"What Is That Supposed To Be" is a publication of the Angryfolk Media Empire (angryfolk.com), created for the sole purpose of promoting Happy Jack's RPG Podcast (happyjacks.org).

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If you would like to submit content to WITSToB, email us at happyjacksrpg@gmail.com. There will be no money now, but on your death bed, when you die, you will received total consciousness.

About Happy Jack's RPG Podcast

Happy Jack's is a weekly show about table-top role-playing games. Our panel of hosts focus their RPG experience and juvenile wit on questions and topics brought to us by the listeners.

Happy Jack's is suggested for mature listeners only. Ironically, this is because the humor is mostly immature. Go figure.

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From the Publisher

Why a Periodical?

You're probably asking yourself that very question, I know I am. "Why a Periodical?" Hmm. Good question. This first issue constitutes numerous hours of work, some of it hard work – not to mention days on the illustrations.

As most of you can guess, it's unlikely that I'll come out with a second issue of WITSToB, let alone meet some kind of ridiculous production schedule, but what the heck, the world is filled – literally filled, I tell ya – with all sorts of half-assed, abandoned projects. Why not add to this!

In all seriousness, I will attempt to produce a couple of these a year. Several listeners to Happy Jack's RPG Podcast have mentioned that they'd like to see my game prep notes, and since I tend to write them as if someone else has to read them anyway, it's not that difficult to format them to fit into a this publication.

My plan is to give this first issue away for free. I know, you're looking at the cover page and saying, "if you're good at something, never do it for free."

I hear ya. I'll probably charge a modest price for future issues, if and when those issues ever come out.

But in the meantime, enjoy this, the premiere issue of WITSToB!

Game Setting...

Mage-Gulch

This is the setting information for my current GURPS-Infinite Worlds campaign. I wanted to make an Old-West setting with magic, a la Deadlands, but not quite as dark. If you are unfamiliar with GURPS-Infinite Worlds, I suggest you check it out at e23.com, Steve Jackson Games' online store. While the book is out of print and hard to find, it is available as a .pdf download. It contains a wealth of alternate-history worlds, usable in a dimension-jumping campaign, and each world would make an interesting campaign setting even without the mucking around through other dimensions.

The year is 1868. More than fifty years since the strange happening that changed the world in ways no one would have guessed.

Since that day, Catholic Priests bless their flock more sparingly, lest they collapse from the effort, Voodoo priests in Haiti and New Orleans use their spells and dolls only on their most feared enemies, lest the demonic spirits they invoke rise up and demand their due.

No one can say exactly why magic started working in the Fall of 1812, but there is no denying that it did.

In Europe, the Holy See, convinced that this new magic was either a sign for God's divine power or proof of a demonic invasion of the living, sought out those with magical abilities and brought them into the priesthood. This significantly increased the power of the Church, in a world where the Age of Reason was born, raised and quickly buried.

In Mother Russia, a dark mage, known only as Efim the Chainbreaker, holds the rural



nation in a grip of terror as his dark army marches East.

In the Middle East, there are rumors of powerful Djinn's roaming the desert, raising armies and creating weird kingdoms of fabulously physics-defying architecture.

The United States

The sudden existence of magic altered history in some significant ways in the United States. The civil war was never fought. President Zachary Taylor sent U.S. Federal Marshall Mages to infiltrate the South to disrupt the southern revolt before it could start.

Slavery was abolished as a result of several slave uprisings, lead no-doubt by slaves with powerful magical talents. Most



mages in the western United States keep a low profile, as the practice of magic (outside of official U.S. Marshall business) is frowned upon. Many make their way in the world as gamblers.

There are rumors that several renown

gunfighters wield items enhanced by magical enchantments, explaining their uncanny accuracy and seeming immunity to bullets.

In the western-most part of North America native American tribes, led by powerful medicine men, have begun to put a halt to Western expansion. Some believe a bloody war between the expanding U.S. and the native Americans is a inevitability.

In New Orleans, several practitioners of Voodoo have created fiefdoms of spirit-power throughout the city. They battle for control of the waterways, and the lucrative commerce that makes its way through the Crescent City.

Plot Hooks and Campaign Seeds

Law Enforcement: Perhaps the party are U.S. Marshalls tasked with keeping order in the wild West. Maybe they

receive telegrams from sheriffs when things get to be too much for them and their deputies to handle. Maybe they are investigating rumors of rogue mages, or searching for deserters.

The Pinkertons: The Pinkerton National Detective Agency was a very prominent private security organization that played a pivotal role in the old West. They were responsible for security of heads of state, they were hired by captains of industry to infiltrate union movements and often played the role of law enforcement where no existed. They may (quietly) hire mages into their ranks.

Indian Sympathizers: Perhaps the party takes on the cause of the Native Americans, infiltrating the U.S. Army, reporting troop movements, running spies or transporting intelligence to the Indian chiefs in the West.

Elsewhere in the World

In future issues, I'll expand upon what is happening in the rest of the world. As it was originally designed as an Old West setting, most of my thoughts have been about that region – but there are interesting things happening in the rest of the world that deserve some attention.

NPC: Winston Branick



Description: Winston Branick is a thirty-something gambler and mage. He has curly black hair and a thick mustache. He wears a bowler, unless he is indoors (wearing a hat indoors is downright uncouth). He is a slender man, somewhat wanting in stature.

He dresses as an old-west dandy, with a pressed white shirt, an ornate silk vest, dark brown wool slacks and a very nice brown wool overcoat made in London (other westerners mistakenly refer to this overcoat as a “duster,” but Winston

Branick would be rather horrified to allow even one speck of dust to rest on his person).

Backstory: He was born in Georgia, the youngest of four boys. His parents owned a rather lucrative cotton plantation, where he learned the finer points of high society. His father, Winston the elder, was none too fond of the young Winston's wandering ways, such adventures are unbecoming of a family of such means. Yet wander he did.

On one such walk-about, when he was learning the ways of shamanism from an Indian medicine man in the West, a right terrible kerfuffle swept through the South, leaving his family plantation burned to the ground and his family dead.

Upon returning to Louisiana, and discovering his family dead, he turned to a darker form of magic. He began his tutelage under the mysterious Dr. LeBlanc, a voodoo master who lived near the cemeteries of New Orleans. From LeBlanc, Winston learned to tap his magical talents and became a fire mage of some note.

He was soon recruited by the U.S. Marshalls, and became one of their most formidable mages. He became disillusioned with this line of work, however, when he was tasked to drive

out the very Indian tribe where he began his magical training.

He abandoned his post and moved westward, where he makes a living as a not untalented gambler, though he never sullies his monetary endeavors with magic.

He is often heard saying (when accused of cheating), "Sir, I may cheat at love, and I have even cheated death, but I never cheat at cards!" This phrase is usually followed by a barrage of gunfire, as Branick is handy with a six-shooter and doesn't take kindly to having his honor impugned.

The Character: Branick is good with his pair of pearl-handled revolvers, but his most formidable strength is his fire magic. However, he rarely resorts to magic, as he prefers that those around him not know he's a mage.

He is adept at draw poker and generally makes a good living at it. He is smooth talker, and likes to know the goings-on in whatever town he's in. He is always looking to expand his knowledge of magic, and can be rather generous with his considerable wealth when it can glean him magical knowledge.

Branick is not strong or quick, but he is very smart, and ruthless to those unfortunate enough to count him as an enemy.

He carries an ebony walking stick with silver filigrees. Atop the walking stick is a large ruby in a silver setting.

Where to Find Him: In the local card room, of course. Being a professional gambler, Branick spends most of his waking hours at the card table, coaxing miners, cowpokes and other unwitting victims to join him at the table.

He often insinuates himself into various business and political dealings, if he finds them interesting and lucrative. He tends to be well-versed with the local criminal element, yet maintains



friendly relations with the local law. Local captains of industry do not like to deal with him in public (he is a gambler, after all), but they may be seen speaking with him briefly in a dark corner or at a private table in a fine dining establishment.

How to Use Him: Branick can be good, yet tedious, source of information. He looks at information as he does any other form of wealth and would rather barter information than give it away outright. He does not make friends quickly, but when he does, his Southern honor makes him a friend to be trusted.

Branick can serve as a patron or a go-between with criminal or business contacts (one-in-the-same, really). If he comes to trust the party, he can also provide formidable backup, if things get sticky.

As a foe, Branick is a nightmare. He knows people in nearly every level of society: local bandits, saloon owners, sheriffs and deputies, mining foreman and owners as well as local land owners and the clergy.

Though not necessarily liked by any of these people, he is respected and sometimes feared.

Because of his razor-sharp mind, he will always be one step ahead of the party – and planning several moves ahead.



Adventure: Mystery of the Brick and Mortar Wall

an adventure suitable for 4-6 players of low-to-moderate intelligence.

The small hamlet of Fumbleburn lies along Fligig Road, which winds a circuitous route through the Gloofunk Mountains. Fumbleburn has enjoyed its fortuitous placement, hosting many a traveler and caravan for the night as they travel along the road.

Last week – however – something went amiss. During the night, a brick and mortar wall mysteriously appeared in one of the many passes in the Gloofunk Mountains, blocking Fligig Road and cutting off Fumbleburn from the rest of the world. The mason's guild of Fumbleburn was quickly dispatched to dismantle the wall, which they did, allowing traffic to flow again unfettered.

The next morning, the wall was back, and the mason's guild was again dispatched to bring the wall down. Now seven days later, the city elders – growing tired of hiring the mason's guild to repeatedly tear down the wall – have called for a band of hearty adventurers to unravel the mystery. No one can say how this conundrum can be solved – perhaps the answer lies in the cave entrance near the site of the wall, the one with the “do not enter” sign.

Adapting this Adventure to an Existing Campaign

Sorry, that won't really work out. You'll need to scrap your current game, as you probably don't have a town called “Fumbleburn” on your world map.

I suppose you could rename an existing town “Fumbleburn,” but it'd have to be near a mountain range called “Gloofunk,” and a road called “Fligig.” The chances of having these exact geographical features with these exact names in your existing campaign world are very unlikely, and if you do, it's most likely a violation of my intellectual property.

GM Information:

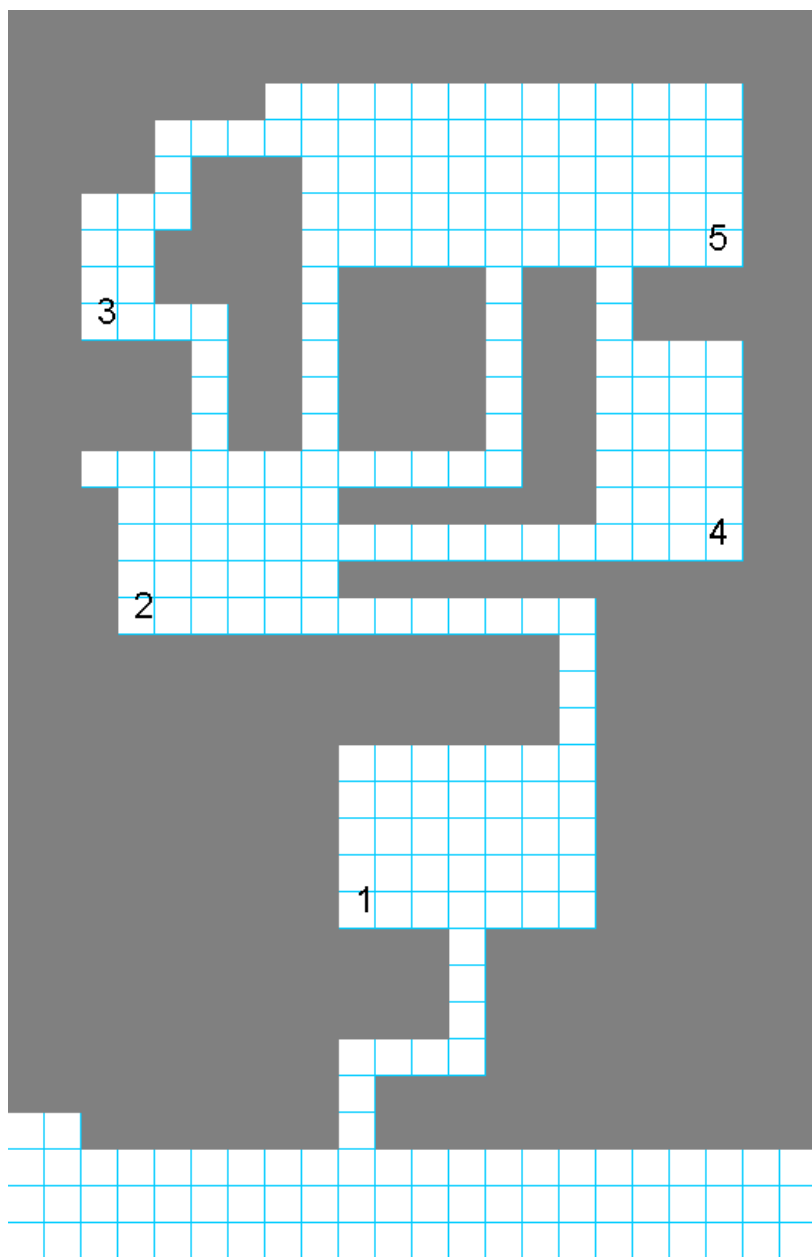
This adventure begins at the cave entrance -- the one with the “do not enter” sign. If the players are unable draw a causal relationship between the mysteriously appearing wall and the cave entrance, consider dropping one or more of the following clues:

1. One of the PCs may see several sets of footprints going from the wall to the cave entrance -- the one with the “do not enter” sign.
2. Someone may notice a trail of bricks going from the wall to the cave entrance -- the one with the “do not enter” sign.
3. Consider having one of the players notice a sign on the wall, saying “Constructed by Do Not Enter Building and Construction.”

If the party contains Lawful characters, they may be reluctant to enter the cave, mistakenly thinking that the “do not enter” sign constitutes some sort of law, which it clearly doesn't. Inform these players that this is considered “bad role-playing,” and that you'll kill their characters if they don't get in the damn cave.

Read the following aloud in a spooky voice:

You stand before a mysterious cave entrance. Sunlight extends into the cave a bit, but quickly turns to a mysterious darkness. You can vaguely see through the shadows that the tunnel beyond appears to veer to the right. Standing menacingly in your path to the cave entrance is a sign, displaying a grave warning: “do not enter.” The font is very old, perhaps ancient, perhaps the preferred font of a civilization long dead.



The Mysterious Cavern Entrance – the one with the “do not enter” sign.

Room One

Room of the Monkey Temple!

Read the following when the PCs enter this room -- use an even spookier voice:

Squatting in the center of the room is a tall stone statue of a monkey. It's blazing eyes appear to be large sapphires. Its right arm is flung back preparing to hurl the giant poo in it's right hand at some unseen foe. Its left hand extends betwixt its parted legs, preparing to receive a new, fresher poo.

The floor very dusty, with a layer of cobwebs covering the floor and the statue. Mysterious foot prints appear to lead to the Northeast corner of the room. The passageway appears to continue in the Northeast corner of the room, as well, but this might be a coincidence.



The poo is not real, it's stone, just like the monkey. If the players choose to investigate further, no, there isn't a poo coming out of the money statue's butt. The sapphires in the eyes, however, are real. Each can be pried out with some effort. The monkey's left eye conceals a trap, unfortunately. Unless greedy little jeweled-eye-prier-outer checks for traps, he'll take the business end of a POISON DART TRAP! Suck it, Thief!

Loot: The two sapphires are worth about 1,000 gold pieces each. The stone poo is worthless, but could be sold for a few coppers, if the party can find a buyer of "unusual artwork."

Room Two

Room of Many Passageways!

Read the following when the PCs enter this room -- even spookier, like Vincent Price.

Your mind reels at the countless choices before you. Never have you seen so many passageways. Choices, choices, choices. Too many! Left? Right? Middle? Maybe the one that's sort of in the middle?

In the center of the room is a large indecisive troll. He stands nearly nine feet tall. His sickly green skin mottled with patches of slime and really bad acne scars. He looks from passageway to passageway, and utters, "If only I had an adventurer whom I could slay and from him harvest his entrails, which I would then spill upon the ground, and use said entrails to determine my way."

The party can attempt to sneak past the troll and make their way down another passageway, but, I mean, c'mon, the troll's right there in the middle of the room. How on Earth can any of them realistically expect to get past the troll without fighting him?

Room Three

The Lair of the Dragon!

Read the following when the PCs approach this room -- try a menacing voice this time.

In the cavern ahead, you hear a deep rumbling. Hot, stinky air blows at you in gusts. It smells like rotten dwarf and body odor. As you carefully approach, you hear a low voice say, "do not enter this room, lest ye wish to be shotted out the other side."

Read this is they enter the room -- keep up the menacing voice, it seems to be working:

Before you lies a big red dragon. His corpulent torso wedged

from ceiling-to-floor and wall-to-wall, giving his body a rather boxy shape. He appears to be wedged in rather tightly, and he cannot move. His long neck and toothy head, however, are quite mobile. He stretches his neck and eyes you menacingly. "A band of adventurers, I see before me. Though tasty you must be, I must refrain, as my belly has no more room to grow. Perhaps if you would be so kind as to chip away at the walls some, I would have room to eat you."



If the party decides to give the poor creature some growing room, he will honorably keep his side of the bargain and attempt to eat them. If not, he will grow angry and flame-breathe them, though he will soon asphyxiate, as he'll burn up all the oxygen in the room.

Loot: If the party dispatches the dragon, they can harvest several tons of dragon scales and a few organs, which might be of use to someone...

Room Four

The Kobold Room!

Read this when the party enters the room, with a high, squeaky voice.

This room contains but one entrance and one exit, depending on which way you enter the room. That is to say, if you enter from the Southwest entrance (make that the entrance, obviously) the only exit is in the Northwest corner,

unless you use the entrance as an exit.

Huddled in the Northeast corner are five small figures. They appear to be Kobolds. Around them are dozens of bricks with bits of mortar stuck to them. The Kobolds appear to be chipping the mortar away from the bricks.

“Curses, me Kobold brethren, a party of adventurers has found our lair,” one says.

“We shall make them pay for their trespassing ways,” says another.

“We shall drive them to the ground with our hammers and take their stuff! How does that sound, adventurers? Doesn't sound very nice does it? Now you know how our kind feel when louts like you walk into our lairs and attempt to do the same! Doesn't seem so fun now, does it?” lectures another.

The party can either stand and fight or retreat and make their way around the Kobold room. The GM should make every effort to kill some, but not all of the party. Killing the entire party would make it difficult for them to finish the dungeon and unravel the mystery of the Brick and Mortar Wall.

Loot: Four stone-working hammers (two of the Kobolds were sharing one), and four iron chisels. They are also carrying 12 silver pieces each (which they don't share).

Room Five

The final room and obligatory boss fight.

Read this when the party enters the room – in a lordly, but not pretentious, voice.

What stands before you is the largest room you've ever seen in this particular dungeon! The length and breadth of the room are vast, with a vaulting ceiling that you couldn't hope to touch, unless you were very tall. In the center of the room stands a large man. He wears a heavy leather apron. Before

him is a giant vat of mortar, which he mixes with a large iron spurtle. There are several wheelbarrows about the room, with other men (three other men to be exact), similarly dressed, pouring buckets of mortar into them.*

Spilling from the westernmost entrance to the room is a large pile of unspeakably foul dragon poo.

“Quickly, my minions, to arms! Do not let these adventurers discover that I, the Master of the Mason's Guild, am secretly building a wall by night, so that the city elders will hire me by day to tear the wall down, thus ensuring our gainful employment in these recessionary times of low wages and little work!

“Dispatch them forthwith, so that we may continue with our nefarious, yet economically sound, plan!”

* If the players do not know what a spurtle is, the GM should refuse to describe it. This is a mystery, after all. The spurtle is a +3 Spurtle of Stirring. While it provides no combat bonus, it does stir things very, very well.

The three minion masons will rush the party, allowing the Master of the Mason's Guild to prepare his spurtle for battle (that's a matter of simply lifting it out of the mortar, really).

Loot: one +3 Spurtle of Stirring, two broadswords, one mace and a morning star. Two of the minions are wearing cloth armor. Each man is carrying 10 gold pieces, except for the Master of the Mason's Guild, who is carrying 80 gold pieces.

Aftermath

Once the party returns to the city of Fumbleburn, the city elders will laud them for their cunning and bravery. They will be given a nice parchment certificate of thanks (penned by the town calligrapher!) and a ceremonial key to the city.

A Final Word

Well that's the first issues of WITSTB. I hope you enjoyed it. Some of it is serious, some of it isn't. If you read the "Mystery of the Brick and Mortar Wall," I assume you realized that this is satire – and a not-too-kind satire at that.

I even lampooned the typical "**Adapting this Adventure to an Existing Campaign**" section one finds in nearly every pre-written adventure. And that's what I'd like to address.

I'm not sure why such a section is included in nearly every module ever published, and some of them are worded as if they're giving the GM "permission" to change the adventure. That cheeses me off.

If you're running a game, it's YOUR game, not WotC's, not Luke Crane's, not Gary Gygax's. No. It's your game, and you can run it however you please (as long as your players buy-in). You don't need permission to change things, be they combat rules, monster stats, combat encounters, names of cities, etc.

Many rulebooks are written in a very authoritarian style, and some of these authors are authorities on things like game balance, statistics and probability, history, etc. But don't let them fool you: they aren't authorities on everything, and they're certainly not authorities on what your group considers fun.

Your group is the only authority on that. If they tell you that you must play their game in a certain way, feel free to ignore them, especially if their way interferes with your fun.

There is no "right" way to play a role-playing game, and conversely, there is no "wrong" way either – unless you're not having fun.

Stu Venable.

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